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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001807

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2015

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SUBJECT: VILLEPIN'S POLICE ADVISOR DISCUSSES FRENCH
INTERNAL SECURITY

REF: PARIS 1569

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

1. (C) Summary: Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin's cabinet advisor on the police said March 15 that the French security establishment is going through a period of "synthesis," in which reforms proposed over the past decades are gradually finding their place within standard operating procedure. He said France remains as focused "as ever" on combating terrorism, but that the latitude offered terrorism investigating judges in the 1980s and 1990s may be waning due to the country's increasing distance from periods when terrorists repeatedly struck on French soil. Regarding violence in French society, he said virtually all acts of violence and criminality were on the decrease, except for troubling increases in the amount of rapes and "gratuitous violence." End summary.

2. (C) On March 15, Poloff met with Jerome Leonnet, the "technical counselor" in Interior Minister Villepin's cabinet in charge of "the organization and administration of police/terrorism/relations with Renseignements Generaux" (France's police intelligence agency). Leonnet has been in Villepin's cabinet since summer 2004. He said he previously worked for seven years with the DST (France's internal security service), seven years with Renseignements Generaux, and a number of years with the Prefecture of Police in Paris.

3. (C) Leonnet described the 1980s and 1990s as decades of great turmoil within the security establishment. He said that terrorism attacks during that period, especially in Paris during the mid-1980s, fed a perception among French citizens that the security establishment was relatively helpless to stop terrorism. In addition, in the late 1990s, France underwent a significant rise in violent crimes, something it had not experienced before. In response, the GOF instituted a number of different laws, including the famous "terrorist conspiracy" law, to give more freedom of action to its security services. This period of reform lasted through 2004, said Leonnet, with the passage of Perben II, an omnibus legal reform bill (reftel). Pointing to two thick red books of criminal law on his shelf, Leonnet said that France had no more need of new laws; what was needed now was bureaucratic implementation, streamlining and coordination. Leonnet expected this period of "synthesis" to continue for the next few years, with a particular focus on training and crisis-response. He also addressed the oft-debated idea to combine the DST and RG intelligence services. It was a bad idea, said Leonnet, because each service had different goals and competencies, and when any mixing of dossiers occurred, it was quickly ironed out through the interagency process.

4. (C) Turning to terrorism, Leonnet said he expected that getting convictions with the "terrorist conspiracy" charge (used to great effect from the 1980s onward) will become more difficult for France's terrorism investigating judges. Initially, said Leonnet, investigating judges like Jean-Louis Bruguiere were given enormous leeway in the conduct of their investigations. Standards of proof for "terrorist conspiracy" were much lower than standards in other criminal cases. However, said Leonnet, the level of evidence required for "terrorist conspiracy" convictions is on the increase. Terrorism investigating judges will need more evidence than was necessary before. Leonnet described this evolution as a natural progression away from the reactive policies of the 1980s and 1990s that takes into account current realities, in which the memory of actual terrorist acts has grown distant and the demand for civil liberties has become stronger. Still, he considered French citizens sensitized to terrorism and aware that France remained a prime target for terrorists.

5. (C) Asked to comment on a newspaper article in early February drawing on Renseignement Generaux sources that reported Islamist radicals controlled approximately 40 mosques/prayer halls in France and numbered approximately 500 militants and 5000 sympathizers, Leonnet said the estimates were correct. There had clearly been an increase in radical Islam in France over the past few years, said Leonnet. Nonetheless, he was optimistic that the long-term trend towards radical Islam would begin to decline. Citing efforts by the GOF such as ensuring that all imams spoke French, close surveillance of mosques and troubled neighborhoods by

police and security services, the "veil" law, and a determination from President Chirac on down to foster integration, Leonnet said the GOF was well aware of its challenges regarding the spread of radical Islam, and it was taking the necessary steps.

16. (C) In any case, said Leonnet, the issues of integration and immigration had no effect on criminal violence. He said that over the past few years, incidents of violence and criminality have been on the decrease. Violence perpetrated by immigrants usually has a financial or social goal, said Leonnet, and those types of crimes have gone down. The two exceptions were cases of rape and "gratuitous violence." On the increase in rapes, Leonnet speculated that the wide diffusion of pornographic films on cable television was an important contributing factor. Regarding "gratuitous violence," or violence committed with no goal in mind, Leonnet said that societal structures that previously weeded out and controlled such behavior no longer played the same role. Mandatory military service was gone, as was full employment and cohesive family structures, all of which contributed to identifying individuals with a propensity towards gratuitous violent acts.

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